

# SAVING WITH ART *species*

*Artist Meredith Graf puts talent to work for conservation*

by CRAIG RIEBEN

Each year thousands of young students descend on the nation's capital to visit the monuments and museums and learn how their government works. In 2009, among those thousands was a eighth-grader from New Orleans, Louisiana, who came to town intent on helping endangered wildlife through the use of her artistic talent. Since that visit, her singular efforts have proved a giant boost to educational efforts for endangered species. And she graciously provided the cover and other original art for this edition of *Fish & Wildlife News*.

This fall, 18-year-old Meredith Graff headed off to college as an accomplished artist and has more than realized her desire to help wildlife. Since that brief visit to Washington, she has been helping to promote and expand the national youth art contest associated with the annual celebration of Endangered Species Day. The contest is a cooperative effort involving the Service, the Endangered Species Coalition, the International Child Art Foundation and the Association of Zoos and Aquariums.

The story actually begins locally at the Service's Ecological Services field office in Louisiana where Meredith first inquired about how she might help the cause of wildlife conservation. Debra Fuller responded to her questions and thoughtfully provided some suggested contacts for her upcoming trip to Washington, DC.

Upon arrival in Washington, she started at the top with a call to then-head of the Endangered Species Program Bryan Arroyo, who referred her to staff members Gloria Bell and Claire Cassel. The result was an impromptu meeting on a park bench one afternoon in front of the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum. Meredith wanted to get involved with the art contest and help promote it using her artistic talent. The possibility of a poster was considered, but Meredith says she felt like doing more and ended up designing and crafting a sculptured bald eagle trophy that is now annually engraved with the name of that year's art contest winner. This is particularly impressive because she had never done any sculpting, but she enlisted the help of a famous local sculptor, James Vella, to instruct and assist with the ambitious project.

Meredith, who won the 2004 Louisiana Junior Duck Stamp Contest, says she has always felt strongly about helping wildlife. Indeed, her great-grandfather, Thomas "Mac" McAmis, was a major voice for wildlife management and conservation in the Southeast for nearly 20 years as head of the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission. He went to work for the commission in 1941 and served as its director from 1945 until his death in 1956. Along the way he also served as chairman of the National Waterfowl Council and the Mississippi Flyway Council.

Meredith's artistic and community efforts have not been restricted solely to wildlife. Diagnosed as a second-grader with ADHD, she has also been highlighted as a role model by the Attention Deficit Disorder Association and has been a guest at the White House. Her efforts have also been recognized through a resolution passed by Louisiana State Legislature. □

This painting by Meredith Graf includes products of both domestic and foreign threatened and endangered species: an elephant tusk, alligator skull, American bald eagle feather, cheetah skin and rhino bone.

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Meredith Graf